

From the President:

National Health Insurance: “Et tu, Brute?”

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Recent attacks on the medical profession by leftist radicals have included preposterous allegations that between 44,000 and 98,000 individuals die in hospitals each year because of medical errors, and that there is a 50 percent chance of an error in patient care in any outpatient encounter.^{1,2} The latter assertion appeared in the prestigious *New England Journal of Medicine*! Coupled with the equally preposterous claim that for all or part of 2001-2002, 75 million Americans were without health insurance, these assertions leave no doubt that a massive push is underway to socialize medicine in this country.³ One manifestation is the recent Robert Wood Johnson Foundation coalition’s campaign for universal coverage.

The cruelest blow of all was recently delivered by our own “brethren.” In August, the *Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA)* published an article by the Physician’s Working Group for Single-Payer National Health Insurance calling for single-payer socialized medicine!⁴ Physicians for a National Health Program (PNHP) endorsed the article.

PNHP has approximately 10,000 members, and they are actively recruiting. In the near future they hope to have 80,000 to 90,000 physicians and medical students endorse the recommendation for national health insurance.

Many of these physicians undoubtedly feel that it is no use to resist the power of an out-of-control government that has forgotten its heritage. Therefore, they appear to be willing to accept government control of our profession in the hope that the plight of physicians and access to medical care will improve.

Is this really a good reason to turn our profession over to the government that caused the problem in the first place by its inappropriate intrusion into the practice of medicine?

Perhaps other physicians in this organization are just leftists who genuinely believe in government-controlled medicine.

In any event, physician endorsement of the “single payer” concept is nothing short of treachery. The editorial board of *JAMA*, the official journal of the American Medical Association (AMA), must be held accountable. One is inclined to ask, like Julius Caesar, “Et tu, Brute?”⁵ The AMA itself, to its credit, has stated that it opposes the article’s call for single-payer national health insurance.

Where have the members of PNHP been living for the past 10 to 15 years? Recent experience shows the approach they advocate to be pure folly. Can they not see the massive deficiencies in Medicare? Are they not aware of the massive volumes of rules and regulations that exist under Medicare? Can they not look at countries that have embraced socialized medicine and see the problems that have occurred there? Are they not appalled by the outlandish jail sentences and fines that are meted out by our judicial system for so-called fraud and abuse, as in the case of Dr. Jeffrey Rutgard? Are they not equally appalled by the use of “drug kingpin” laws by our government to seize assets of pain management physicians even before a trial and to sentence them to draconian prison terms, as in the case of Dr. James Graves, a 56-year-old family physician sentenced to 63 years because a few of his patients

misused their pain prescriptions? Are they not aware of the inappropriate prosecutions that are occurring in the Medicaid program as in the case of Dr. Robert Mitrione and his wife in Springfield, Illinois, where false testimony was used by the prosecution to gain a criminal conviction?

The treachery of PNHP may be a deathblow to our profession and to the best medical care that the world has ever known, but it does not have to be. Physicians must be alerted to the fact that our profession is under a massive siege by leftists who are determined to socialize medicine in this country in the near future. To this end, we who are members of the Association of American Physicians and Surgeons (AAPS) must sound the alarm and spread with evangelical zeal our message of free-market medicine and medicine based on the traditional Oath of Hippocrates to every corner of this nation. We have very little time to combat this abominable onslaught.

We must begin now! If we do not act, everyone will suffer because of the inevitable decline in American medicine. There will most assuredly be massive increases in taxes and significant rationing of medical care. Euthanasia and assisted suicide will be commonplace. Physicians will practice under even more oppressive rules and regulations than they endure now. A huge Big Brother computer system will be foisted upon us all: there will be no medical privacy. Politicians will divert with impunity funds needed for medical care to their pet projects.

What else should AAPS do? We must rapidly and significantly increase our membership in order to engage the enemy effectively. We must establish active AAPS organizations in every state. We must learn to communicate effectively with our elected officials.

We must not approach organized medicine with animosity, but rather see it as a challenge and an opportunity. We must become involved as individuals, not only in our specialty societies, but at all levels of organized medicine from the county medical societies to the AMA. We must present our message in a kind and caring manner with respect for differing opinions, for it is a message of hope, freedom, and sanity.

Truth, honesty, and integrity can prevail—but only if we act quickly and decisively.

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REFERENCES

¹ Kohn LT, Corrigan JM, Donaldson MS (Institute of Medicine). *To Err is Human: Building a Safer Health System*. Washington, D.C.: National Academy Press; 2000.

² McGlynn EA, Asch SM, Adams J, et al. The quality of healthcare delivered to adults in the United States. *N Engl J Med* 2003;348:2635-45.

³ Our View: 75 million uninsured? That’s just intolerable. *Peoria Journal Star*, March 14, 2003, A4.

⁴ Woolhandler S, Himmelstein, DU, Angell M, Young QD. Proposal of the Physician’s Working Group for Single-Payer National Health Insurance. *JAMA* 2003; 290: 798-805.

⁵ Shakespeare W. *Julius Caesar*.